

Michael Gillott

February 13, 2008

Poli 361

Narrative Paper

America is a country of contradiction. The innovative and modern in its western culture fails to coincide with the traditional and steady election process and mentality of the American majority. Through 216 years as a recognized nation and numerous strides in racial and ethnic equality, not one commander-in-chief has emerged as a shift from the conventional white-male standard; until now. Two candidates, one of them a woman, one a black male, and both democrats, are challenging both terms, white and male, in the 2008 election. Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton are both potential presidential candidates representing the views of the Democratic Party. The diversity of both these candidates combined with the controversial issues encircling the election make this one of the most crucial ballots of our time. With both already straying from the norm, it is safe to say that the more conservative candidate out of the two will end up taking the democratic candidacy. Although Obama's campaign and ideals hold the support of both the youth and black community, Hilary Clinton's more orthodox policies and structure makes her a more likely choice, for conservatives, in the 2008 election.

While Obama fronts a neo-political campaign and a popular newness, his ideals may be too turbulent and divergent from the traditions of the United States. It is clear that racism and prejudice in America have clearly diminished, however this doesn't mean that a black man at the head of the government is so easily comprehensible. As this alone is sad but realistically challenging for many to overlook, the addition of a somewhat novel

string of policies may be too much for one election. The fact of the matter is America can only handle so much change at a time. Whether or not Obama's shift in policies is for better or for worse is not the question; it is how the public will react to these prospective changes that will shape the outcome of the election. Obama has preached a newfound relationship within the government, one that will eliminate the hindering distinction between red states and blue states. **"...The reason I'm running in this race is because I believe we have to bring in independents and, yes, Republicans into a conversation about a progressive, commonsense agenda for change"** (www.govote.com). This instability in sticking with his own party was discomfoting for many democrats and republicans alike to hear. A loose candidate is not someone who democrats would like to have at the forefront representing their party. Even more alarming for democrat conservatives, was Obama's stance on foreign enemies. For quite some time it has been our countries policy to shut out both terrorist and communist leaders of other nations and sects. Obama announced an alteration in that policy when he argued, **"A strong country and a strong president are not afraid to talk to their enemies"** (Obama 2007). Although possibly a brilliant notion, this drastic change in a traditional American ideal may again be too atypical and bold for the American people. Obama basically advocated reaching out to leaders such as Fidel Castro, startling other politicians. After this statement Obama received much criticism from the other nominees, contesting that Obama is both "naïve" and "irresponsible". These traits were enforced by his inexperience. Barack Obama has been a US senator for the state of Illinois for a mere two years, which many feel is short of the sufficient amount of experience needed to give people faith in a candidate.

Though Obama may be the most likely to win the election, his certain attributes and attained demographics of voters make him a strong challenger for Hilary. The attractiveness of Barack's freshness and individuality will no doubt appeal to the youth of America. With the **youth making up almost 17% (www.ncec.org) of the upcoming election**, this represents a huge demographic. In addition, as John F. Kennedy took the catholic vote, Barack Obama will take most of the backing of the black community. His racial stance is essentially unique, with many deeming Obama a "post-racial politician". This basically means that Obama moves away from racial differences rather than focusing on them. He feels that the acknowledgement and fixation on race will only further display its presence. Not only does Obama have the support of these two strong groups, but he has a mark of consistency that highlights his strength as well. To the attack on his political experience Obama replied, **"...I think the question that people have to ask themselves is: Who has the right experience and who has the judgment to lead this country?" (Obama 2007)** Obama corroborated this with one of his strongest factors going into this election, his antiwar views in 2002. While Hilary Clinton campaigned for the war and is now currently against the war, Obama has been unwavering in his stance against the invasion of Iraq from the beginning. To many, this shows steadfast fortitude and independence, both of which the other politicians often fail to exhibit.

On the subject of abortion, Hilary advocated a less liberal approach deeming abortion as a **"sad, even tragic, act" (Clinton 2007)**. Rather than fully argue for free choice, Hilary asked for women to attempt to avoid abortion if possible. Her remarks on the subject concerned if not angered women who had viewed Hilary to be somewhat of a feminist. As stated before, Hilary's congressional vote to engage in war with Iraq is quite

a negative factor for this upcoming election. This specific factor is actually contributed partially to John Kerry's loss in the 2004 election. However, he eventually shifted to an antiwar stance, his prior vote for invasion had already done its damage. Democrats are afraid that this same fact will true for Clinton. Their paranoia is strengthened with a Gallup poll done this past May, where only 29% of people said they would vote for Hilary in the actual election and almost 40% said they would not. "The image", an element that has become increasingly important, is something Clinton has been trying to work on. Her stiffness and harsh personality makes her a constant target for dislike and criticism. Although she has recently been trying to improve upon that image, a negative perception is something that is very hard to change and overcome.

With Clinton's more conventional stance, popularity of her husband and strong lead with democratic conservatives in the polls make Hilary the probable choice for them in the 2008 election. While Obama advocates a new type of foreign policy, Clinton retains the traditional positions. In a debate in July 2007, Clinton argued with Obama regarding the capriciousness of his controversial idea.

Despite the fact that both candidates have distinguishable characteristics and policies, they certainly agree on some of the key fundamentals surrounding the election of 2008. Through their similar plans, Obama's Iraq War De-escalation Act of 2007 and Hilary's Iraq Troop Protection and Reduction Act of 2007, both contenders plan to gradually withdraw troops, reduce troop deployment and establish a political solution within the Iraqi Government. These plans are highly focused upon, seeing as the War with Iraq is undoubtedly the most important issue of the 2008 election. Both nominees additionally support the increased funding of stem cell research to further promote

healthcare through technology. Hilary and Obama also agree on educational funding, which they plan to increase. While the two are clearly on the same page regarding certain issues, they only differ slightly in other aspects. However, this distinction is heightened when the need for contrasting becomes evident. America therefore will base these two nominations on their other attributes and standings, most of which relate to their overall political beliefs. His policies, though possibly genius, are too new and overwhelming for the traditional minds of many Americans. Contrary to this, Hilary actually has toned down her liberal opinions, leaving her the more conventional and approved candidate, despite the fact that she is a different gender. Unfortunately, newness has become something to be feared. Until we are able to overcome this apprehension, potentially great presidents and great minds alike will be hindered from achieving their full potential.

Works Cited

1. www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008; "The Clinton-Obama battle reveals two very different ideas of the Presidency." George Packer January 28, 2008
2. cnn.com; speech about Iraq; Barack Obama October 12, 2007
3. www.ncec.org; "Election Insider"; 2007
4. Salon.com, "Barack Obama wants to transform politics. But can he defeat Hillary Clinton by casting her as the divider and himself as the uniter?" By Walter Shapiro
5. www.ontheissues.org "Hillary Clinton on Abortion"
6. www.gallup.com "Analysis of Support for Barack Obama" October 2007
7. www.barackobama.com; Speeches